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Lending a helping hand

Provision of helping behaviors beyond professional career responsibilities

Lending a
helping hand

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to investigate if gender and altruism evidence similar relationships with the different types of helping behaviors (e.g. organizational citizenship behaviors, OCBs; volunteering, vol; and helping kin, HK).

Design/methodology/approach – Data from websurveys of 178 professional employees are analyzed using Zellner's seemingly unrelated regression (SURE).

Findings – Results indicate women engage in HK to a greater extent than men, however this difference between men and women in helping behaviors disappears when the other variables are entered in the model. Gender and altruism interacted to influence OCBs, such that the relationship was stronger for women than for men.

Practical implications – An important implication of these results is that by knowing the motives that are most important to people, organizations may tailor their appeals to potential volunteers. Targeting potential volunteers is most effective when it matches people's reasons for volunteering.

Originality/value – The unique contribution of this study is that it simultaneously examined the relationship between altruism and the three types of helping behavior in a single study.

Keywords Gender, Altruism, Individual behaviour

Paper type Research paper

Helping behaviors can be defined as activities entailing more commitment than spontaneous assistance in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, organization or cause (Wilson, 2000). Helping behaviors can be targeted toward individuals or organizations, and can occur in different contexts. In the present paper, we want to focus on helping behaviors beyond professional career responsibilities (e.g. extra role behaviors that are not part of the job description). We focus on interpersonal helping (i.e. helping other individuals) that naturally occurs in two different contexts: in the context of one's organization (i.e. organizational citizenship behaviors, OCBs) and outside the organizational context (i.e. volunteering, vol; and helping kin, HK).

First, helping behaviors within organizations are voluntary and discretionary behaviors that contribute to an organization's effectiveness but typically are not included in traditional definitions of job performance (Organ and Konovsky, 1989). Such behaviors are generally referred to as OCBs (Bateman and Organ, 1983; Motowidlo *et al.*, 1997; Organ and Ryan, 1995; Turnipseed and Murkison, 1996).



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Examples of OCBs include performing extra-job activities, helping colleagues, meeting workplace rules, and acting according to the procedures regardless of personal inconvenience (Organ and Ryan, 1995).

Second, in contrast to helping behaviors that occur within an organization (i.e. OCBs), helping behaviors can also occur outside the organizational context and these helping behaviors are of significant importance to the larger society. Every year, millions of people volunteer substantial amounts of time to activities, such as cooking for drug addicts, tutoring the illiterate, and counseling troubled people (Clary *et al.*, 1998). HK is a third type of helping behavior. An example of this latter form of helping behavior is taking care of sick relatives.

A substantial body of research has examined antecedents of OCBs or helping behaviors within one's career. Likewise, a few studies have examined the relationship between altruism and volunteerism. In contrast, research on the antecedents of HK is sparse. In addition, no study has simultaneously examined the relationship between antecedents and different types of helping behaviors within and outside the organization. However, there are several reasons why examination of different types of helping behaviors is important. First, despite some apparent similarities there are also some marked differences among these helping behaviors. For example, helping behaviors differ with regard to the degree of familiarity of the recipients and feelings of moral obligation to help. An awareness of such similarities and differences among the different types of helping behaviors and their association with antecedents, such as altruism, may serve as a basis for stimulating helping behaviors. Second, limiting analyses of helping behaviors to those directed toward others within an organization (i.e. OCBs) implies that other helping behaviors are of minor importance (Gallagher, 1994; Gerstel and Gallagher, 1993). In fact, from a broader societal perspective, helping others outside one's organization may be just as important as helping others within one's organization.

Moreover, helping behaviors may not be independent from each other. For instance, taking care of kin can be time consuming and exhausting, and could come at the expense of other types of helping behaviors, particularly volunteerism. This implies that in examining one type of helping behavior (e.g. OCBs), the effects of other types of helping behaviors should be controlled. To date, no study has simultaneously examined the relationship between antecedents and different types of helping behaviors directed toward individuals within the organization and outside of the organization. To ensure a rigorous test of our hypotheses we will use a special multivariate regression model called Zellner's (1962) seemingly unrelated regression (SURE), that permits examination of each type of helping behaviors while simultaneously taking the effects of other types of helping behaviors into account.

In the present study, we examine if gender and altruism evidence similar relationships with the different types of helping behaviors (e.g. OCBs, Vol, and HK), and if there are any gender differences in the relationships between altruism and the three types of helping behaviors.

Different types of helping behaviors

Conceptually, helping behaviors have been associated with social responsibility (Flanagan *et al.*, 1998; Witt, 1990) or communal work, both of which are generally characterized by the absence of monetary payment for the work undertaken

(Noon and Blyton, 1997). Other concepts that are related to helping behaviors are extra-role behaviors (Van Dyne and LePine, 1998; Wright *et al.*, 1993), pro-social behaviors (Bateman and Organ, 1983; Brief and Motowidlo, 1986; Farmer and Fedor, 2001; Organ and Konovsky, 1989; Piliavin and Charng, 1990; Smith *et al.*, 1983; Witt, 1990), and contextual performance (e.g. Motowidlo *et al.*, 1997; Organ, 1997; Van Scotter *et al.*, 2000).

Helping behaviors within and outside the organizational context have some differences and some similarities. Usually, helping behaviors are long-term behaviors (Penner *et al.*, 1997), although it is possible that people might just help a colleague once or volunteer once at a shelter. Further, the three types of helping behaviors are essentially carried out to produce and maintain the well-being and integrity of others, that is, organizations and individuals beyond organization's boundaries (Brief and Motowidlo, 1986). However, the three helping behaviors differ on two dimensions, familiarity with recipient and moral obligation. First, helping behaviors can vary according to the degree of familiarity with the recipients. Typically, compared to vol, OCBs are directed toward more or less familiar recipients, such as colleagues or customers. In contrast, vol is directed toward non-familiar recipients. Frequently, volunteers do not know in advance who they help, since they are matched with recipients by service organizations (Omoto and Snyder, 1995). Furthermore, HK is directed toward well-known recipients and, in contrast to vol, knowing the recipients is an essential part of the helping relationship.

Second, helping behaviors can vary with respect to the extent of perceived moral obligation. Helping behaviors can be viewed as a moral obligation: not only are individuals expected to look out for their own welfare, but they are expected to consider what is best for others, including the society as a whole (Karp, 1996). Compared to HK, OCBs and vol may be less motivated by feelings of obligation. Commonly, HK seems to be highly motivated by genuine feelings of obligation and is seen as a demanding but an obliging part of everyday life (Gerstel and Gallagher, 1993). Norms for HK can be much stronger than norms for helping non-kin and, based on this idea, we can expect people to report helping family members more than engaging in vol (Hofferth *et al.*, 1999). Though HK often entails a great deal of work, it is often taken for granted whereas vol to help is often not taken for granted.

In addition, it is quite possible that the different types of helping behaviors are not independent of each other and that engagement in one type of helping behavior may interfere with the engagement in other helping behaviors. Indeed, family obligations in the form of HK and the concomitant depletion of energy is often regarded as a reason for the relatively high rate of turnover in volunteer organizations (Wilson, 2000).

Gender differences and antecedents of helping behaviors

According to Bem's gender socialization perspective (1974), the masculine role endorses more instrumental qualities and the feminine role endorses more communal traits. Studies indeed showed that women consistently rate themselves as more empathic and altruistic than men (Wilson and Musick, 1997). Gender role socialization may be related to social responsibility orientation. Men are able to ignore the norm of social responsibility in order to optimize their own outcomes, whereas women are more likely to adhere to the norm of social responsibility and moral obligation even in the absence of reciprocation (Witt, 1990). Overall, studies report that women are more likely to become

involved in vol than men (Flanagan *et al.*, 1998; Hart *et al.*, 1998). Moreover, voluntary behaviors of women are more frequently directed at HK (i.e. family and friends) than those of men. It appears that women volunteer less in formal settings, and more in informal settings than do men (Gallagher, 1994; Gerstel and Gallagher, 1993).

Studies examining gender differences in the extent of engagement in OCBs have not provided conclusive results (Moorman and Blakely, 1995; Organ and Ryan, 1995). The instrumental orientation of men (Bem, 1974) together with the general expectation of rewards for OCBs may encourage men to engage in OCBs, thus minimizing any potential differences in helping between men and women within an organization context.

H1. Women will engage in vol and HK to a greater extent than men.

Altruism

Altruism, the enduring tendency to benefit others, is one of the most consistent individual resources related to helping behaviors (Carlo *et al.*, 1991). A substantial body of research has focused on helping behaviors of paid-employees (i.e. OCBs) within organizations (Organ and Ryan, 1995; Rioux and Penner, 2001; Smith *et al.*, 1983; Turnipseed and Murkison, 1996; Van Dyne *et al.*, 1994). Studies show employees giving altruistic reasons for becoming involved in helping behaviors, such as wanting to help others (Farmer and Fedor, 2001; Penner and Finkelstein, 1998; Wilson and Musick, 1997). The study of Penner and Finkelstein (1998) found a "pro-social personality" to be related to volunteer activities. Specifically, other-oriented empathy, as a dimension of altruism, was associated with pro-social actions: Concern for the welfare of others, satisfaction derived from being helpful, and feelings of responsibility for others' welfare. Midili and Penner (1995) found a similar relationship between the pro-social personality and OCBs in the workplace (Midili and Penner, 1995). Moreover, an important function that may be served by involvement in helping behaviors is the opportunity to express values related to altruistic and humanitarian concerns for others (Clary *et al.*, 1998).

In summary, previous studies have related altruism to helping behaviors within organizations (OCBs) (Carlo *et al.*, 1991; Piliavin and Charng, 1990; Smith *et al.*, 1983). Studies have also documented a relationship between altruism and vol (Farmer and Fedor, 2001) and HK (Gallagher, 1994; Gerstel and Gallagher, 1993). However, the relationship between altruism and all three types of helping behaviors has not been examined within a single study. This study is the first study to directly examine if altruism serves as an antecedent for each of the three types of helping behaviors.

H2. Altruism will be positively associated with the engagement in each of the three types of helping behaviors.

Consistent with the gender socialization perspective (Bem, 1974), a number of studies have reported that women engage more in vol (Flanagan *et al.*, 1998; Hart *et al.*, 1998) and HK (i.e. family and friends) than men (Gallagher, 1994; Gerstel and Gallagher, 1993). It is quite possible that the predisposition of altruism will enhance this tendency of women to be helpful. Reports that women often actually behave in a more altruistic fashion than men (Lovell *et al.*, 1999) is suggestive of this possibility. Because societal expectations prescribe men to engage more in performance-related

behaviors relative to other-oriented helping behaviors, their gender is unlikely to influence their level of altruism on helping behaviors. Thus, we expect gender and altruism to interact, such that the relationship between altruism and helping will be stronger for women than for men.

H3. The relationship between altruism and each of the three types of helping behaviors will be stronger for women than for men.

In summary, we expect that altruism will be positively associated with the engagement in each of the three types of helping behaviors. Further, we expect that women will engage more in helping behaviors than men and that the relationship between altruism and each of the three types of helping behaviors will be stronger for women than for men.

Method

Participants

Data were obtained from a sample consisting of 178 employees (101 male and 77 female) from three professional organizations, a bank ($n = 95$, mean tenure 9.39 years), a city council ($n = 35$, mean tenure 10.05 years), and a university ($n = 48$, mean tenure 5.74 years) located in the Netherlands. All respondents had considerable work experience. Participants from the bank were employed in jobs, such as tellers, department head and complaints officer. Participants from the city council were employed in jobs including financial consultant, secretary, and human resources. Participants from the university were employed as researchers, associate professors, and grant coordinators.

Participants were requested to complete a web-questionnaire and return it anonymously by e-mail. A total of 550 web-questionnaires were distributed with a 32 per cent response rate. On average the respondents were 38.33 ($SD = 9.78$) years of age had 14.90 ($SD = 2.54$) years of education. On average, the male respondents spent more hours on paid labor than the female respondents (*for men*: Mean 40.03 hours, $SD = 7.33$, *for women*: Mean 35.55 hours per week, $SD = 8.11$, $p < 0.01$). The male and female respondents did not differ in the number of hours they devote to vol (*for men*: Mean = 1.52 hours, $SD = 2.98$, *for women*: Mean = 1.49 hours per week, $SD = 2.35$, ns). Women devoted more time on HK than men (*for men*: Mean 0.36 hours, $SD = 0.97$, *for women*: Mean 1.32 hours per week, $SD = 2.33$, $p < 0.01$).

Measures

Helping behaviors. The engagement in volunteerism and taking care of kin were measured in hours per week devoted to these two helping behaviors. An individual can potentially engage in a myriad of activities in terms of volunteering, and taking care of kin. Therefore, we did not want to provide subjects with a list of specific volunteer and taking care of kin activities because they may very well engage in activities not included in the list. In addition, because there are no validated scales to broadly measure volunteerism and HK behaviors, we used a common denominator, time spent on these two activities as the dependent variable. In contrast, OCBs are well understood and articulated in the literature, and there are reliable scales to measure OCBs. Therefore, OCBs were measured with six items ($\alpha = 0.79$) adapted from Organ and Konovsky (1989) and studies of Van Dyne *et al.* (1994). A sample item is

“At work, I volunteer for things that are not required.” Factor analysis yielded a one-factor solution (eigenvalue 2.95) that explained 49 per cent of the scale variance.

Independent variables. Altruism was inventoried with seven items ($\alpha = 0.92$) from the survey of interpersonal values of Gordon (1976). A sample item is “I think it is important to help people who are in need.” Factor analysis showed a one-factor solution (eigenvalue 3.21) that explained 80 per cent of the scale variance.

Control variables. Educational level (in years of education completed) and age were included in the analyses. Level of education is the one of the most consistent predictors of helping behaviors (i.e. vol) because education heightens awareness of social problems, and because educated people are more likely to be asked to volunteer. As people get older, they are likely to transition from self- and career-oriented activism and engage more in community-oriented work (Wilson, 2000). Therefore, age was also included as a control variable. We also included hours devoted to paid work as a control variable because the engagement in different activities, such as HK and volunteerism, is dependent on the availability of time. For instance, when leisure time is scarce, people may pursue alternatives that better distribute work and leisure time. Moreover, volunteers can easily choose to allocate their time to other activities when those alternatives become more attractive (Farmer and Fedor, 2001). Therefore we also controlled for the number of actual (working) hours spent on paid labor.

Results

Table I presents means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients for all measures included in the study. At the univariate level, OCBs and vol are not correlated, but OCBs and taking care of kin are correlated ($r = 0.16, p < 0.05$). Volunteering and taking care of kin are also correlated ($r = 0.15, p < 0.05$). Only volunteering ($r = 0.30, p < 0.01$) and HK ($r = 0.23, p < 0.01$) are related to altruism. OCBs are unrelated to altruism.

Regression models were estimated with seemingly SURE. Rather than solving a set of separate regression equations one by one, SURE solves the set of equations simultaneously to take into account covariances between the error terms of the equations. SURE is an appropriate technique for research problems that include regression equations with (partially) overlapping predictor variables (Kalmijn and Bernasco, 2001). We used SURE rather than ordinary least squares regression because in contrast to ordinary least squares regression, SURE allows one to analyze the influence of independent variables on multiple dependent variables

Table I.
Means, standard
deviations, and Pearson
correlations

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
OCB	4.00	0.46							
Volunteering	1.51	2.72	−0.00						
Helping Kin	0.78	1.76	0.16*	0.15*					
Gender	0.43	0.50	−0.04	−0.01	0.27**				
Educational level	14.90	2.55	0.18*	0.01	−0.07	0.05			
Age	38.33	9.78	0.30**	0.16*	0.29**	−0.15	−0.19*		
Hours	38.08	7.97	0.03	0.10	−0.06	−0.28**	0.23**	0.08	
Altruism	3.57	0.94	0.12	0.30**	0.23**	0.25**	0.02	0.13	0.07

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

simultaneously (e.g. influence of altruism and gender on the three types of helping behaviors simultaneously). Three hierarchical analyses were conducted: for the total population, for women and for men. In each analysis the dependent variables were the three types of helping behaviors: OCBs, vol and HK. To test specifically for interaction effects, the variables were entered in three steps. In Step 1, education, age and hours of paid work were entered. In Step 2, gender and altruism were entered. In Step 3, the product variable, computed by multiplying gender with altruism was added. Thereby, hypothesis 3 about the moderating role of gender could be tested. Since men most frequently work more hours than women, we also added the interaction of gender with hours work. Table II shows the results of the SURE analyses.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that women would engage in vol and HK than men to a greater extent. The univariate statistics show that women engage in HK to a greater extent than men ($r = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$), however this difference between men and women in helping behaviors disappears when the other variables are entered in the model.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that altruism would be positively associated with the engagement in each of the three types of helping behaviors. As shown in Table II, for the total population, altruism is only related to volunteering ($b = 1.60$, $p < 0.01$). When the data was analyzed separately for men and women, altruism of men was associated with both volunteering ($b = 1.56$, $p < 0.01$) and HK ($b = 0.46$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, there was only weak support for hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the relationship between altruism and each of the three types of helping behaviors will be stronger for women than for men. The results of the SURE analysis indicate that the gender*altruism interaction is significant for OCBs ($b = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$). Inspection of separate analyses for men and women indicated that the slope of the regression equation for women ($b = 0.16$, $p < 0.01$) is steeper than that for men ($b = -0.04$, ns), i.e. there was no relationship between altruism and OCBs for men. Thus, hypothesis 3 is supported for OCBs.

Discussion

On average, men and women do not differ in OCBs and the number of hours they devote to volunteering, but women spend more than three times as many hours helping kin than men. Further, there was not much evidence for an association between hours of paid work and the three types of helping behaviors, suggesting that helping behaviors occur relatively independent of elements associated with paid work. Unlike most prior studies that examined a single type of helping behavior, in this study, we examined engagement in three different types of helping behaviors simultaneously. Women and men differ in the engagement in HK (at the univariate level), but this difference disappears when we control for education, age and number of hours devoted to paid work.

Unexpectedly, altruism was only related to volunteering, although for men it was also related to HK. Probably, for both OCBs and HK, motives other than altruism might be prevalent. For instance, OCBs may be more motivated by their possible instrumental value, whereas HK may be more motivated by felt moral obligations. There was no relationship between altruism and OCBs for men, but such relationship did exist for the women in this study. Probably, it is again important to differentiate between altruistic and other motivating factors. OCBs, for example, are not always principally altruistic. Frequently there exists an element of expectation of a return for

Table II.
Results of Zellner's
seemingly unrelated
regression analyses for
OCBs, Vol, and HK
(unstandardized
regression coefficients)

	Total (<i>n</i> = 178)		Women (<i>n</i> = 77)		Men (<i>n</i> = 101)	
	OCBs	Vol	HK	OCBs	Vol	HK
Step 1						
Gender ^a	0.55	-1.16	-0.05	-	-	-
Educational level	-0.03*	0.02	-0.04	-0.01	0.10	-0.08
Age	0.01	0.04	0.05**	0.02**	0.06	-0.00
Step 2						
Hours work	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	-0.00	-0.00	0.01
Altruism	0.02	1.60**	0.35	0.16**	1.56**	0.46**
Step 3 (Interactions)						
Gender*Hours work	-0.02	0.02	0.03	-	-	-
Gender*Altruism	0.18*	-0.91	0.03	-	-	-
R ² Step 1	0.10**	0.03	0.16**	0.25**	0.05	0.03
R ² Step 2	0.14**	0.11**	0.18**	0.32**	0.15*	0.11*
R ² Step 3	0.17**	0.13**	0.18**			

Notes: ^a When entering only gender in the analysis, gender is associated with HK (*b* = 1.01, *p* < 0.01) but not associated with OCBs and volunteering
* *p* < 0.05, ** *p* < 0.01

engaging in OCBs. For men, this may translate into more instrumental motives that will give rise to OCBs. Though one sex may not be more altruistic than the other, the ways in which men and women help may also differ. For instance, with men more likely to help in “heroic” ways and women more likely to help in ways that involves a long-term commitment (Aronson *et al.*, 2005).

The results of this study show some interesting similarities and differences concerning the helping behaviors. For instance, hours work was not related to any of the three helping behaviors. Age was positively associated with HK. This relationship is what one would expect as middle-aged working adults often devote a significant amount of time helping their aging parents. For instance, Gallagher (1994) found, just like the present study, that older people spend more time HK and this highlights that HK remains important in the lives of older people. Further, for women, age was positively related to HK. Not only do women spend far more time taking care of kin but they also continue to engage in this type of helping behavior when getting older. One would expect older people to spend more time volunteering but surprisingly age was unrelated to volunteering in this data.

Limitations

This study, like all studies, has limitations. The data were collected via self-report measures and common method variance easily can become a problem, also the cross-sectional design precludes causal relationships. Future research efforts need not only consider using longitudinal data, but also might focus particularly on the significance of more comprehensive definitions of helping behaviors beyond the professional career responsibilities. Generalizability of the findings may be limited to employees working within professional organizations. For instance, white collar and professional employees may be more likely to engage in helping behaviors than other occupational groups (e.g. blue collar) as their jobs involve qualities that make it likely that they will engage in volunteering (Pearce, 1987; Wilson and Musick, 1997). Future research must determine if these results hold for blue-collar employees. Further, the use of cross-sectional data precludes inferences about causality and directionality. Generalizability of the findings may also be limited to specific national cultures, that is, people’s cultural background may also matter. The present study was conducted in the Netherlands, and Netherlands scores relatively high on femininity (Hofstede, 1998). In feminine cultures, centrality of personal and family life is important and there is a significant emphasis on helping and display of cooperative behaviors. Thus, compared to members of less feminine cultures, members of feminine cultures are more likely to help others (Hofstede, 1998).

Managerial implications

The more or less implicit assumption of this study is that helping behaviors are not only good for individuals or society, but also for organizations. Moreover, OCBs and for instance community service are generally expected of people in professional and managerial occupations. Organizations may benefit from employees that extend their performance beyond their professional career responsibilities and may seek opportunities that actively promote these behaviors. Simply providing extra hours for these activities does not seem to be the strategy of first choice, since we have found not much evidence for an association between hours of paid work and the three types

of helping behaviors. It was suggested that helping behaviors occur relatively independent of elements associated with paid work. However, helping behaviors may be actively promoted by organizations by explicit acknowledgement in performance appraisals and also by explicitly rewarding them as desirable behaviors.

The unique contribution of this study is that it simultaneously examined the relationship between altruism and the three types of helping behavior in a single study. One important implication of these results is that by knowing the motives that are most important to people, organizations may tailor their appeals to potential volunteers. Some research shows that appeals targeted at potential volunteers are most effective when they match people's reasons for volunteering (Clary *et al.*, 1998). Helping behaviors are necessary for both the effective functioning of an organization (Bateman and Organ, 1983; Organ and Ryan, 1995; Smith *et al.*, 1983) and the society as a whole (Putnam, 1995). Further, whether the engagement in one type of helping behavior interferes or energizes an individual to engage in different types of helping behaviors might very well depend on whether the motives underlying the helping behaviors are consistent with each other or not. With few exceptions (Rioux and Penner, 2001), research on motives underlying helping behaviors is virtually non-existent and is sorely needed. Helping others is likely to benefit the person offering the help as well. These benefits might be manifested in the form of enhanced self-esteem, confidence, and social capital. It is also possible that helping others beyond one's capacity or internal resources could result in distress and burnout. There is virtually no research on the psychological consequences to the helper of helping others. Such research along with research on motives underlying helping behaviors is likely to lead to insights about the nature of helping behaviors.

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